

# Education and Employability: Apex Scotland

**Bernadette Monaghan** provides information on a voluntary agency working in Scottish prisons.

The difficulties of resettlement for ex-offenders in Scotland can be inferred from the statistics: 82% of all prison sentences in Scotland are for 6 months or less and 60% of those sent to our young offenders institution, HMYOI Polmont, are sentenced to less than 6 months. It is also estimated, conservatively, that 25% of those in prison in Scotland have below functional levels of literacy and 33% have problems with basic numeracy. Two thirds of prisoners also arrive in prison from unemployment and three quarters leave with no job to go to.

Apex Scotland is a voluntary agency addressing the employability needs of offenders, ex-offenders and young people at risk, with the aim of improving their prospects for employment and reducing their risk of reoffending. We provide employment and guidance services to local authorities in partnership with criminal justice social work, and services to 12 prison establishments in Scotland.

Between 1 April 2003 and 31 March 2004, Apex received 6721 referrals across its range of services – employment and guidance to those serving community sentences, supervised attendance orders as an alternative to custody for fine default, prison based services, Jobcentre Plus initiatives such as Progress2Work for ex-drug users and services on behalf of Scottish Enterprise and local enterprise companies.

Of these, 4504 people started work with Apex and 2206 completed programmes in this period. The following outcome data is available for 1058 of those who completed:

Full time employment	448
Part-time employment	48
Further education	194
Training	286
ILM placement	15
Voluntary work	67

Apex Scotland provides an employability service and a learning support service in HMYOI Polmont.

The employability service received 383 referrals between 1 April 2003 and 31 March 2004, but lack of resources only allowed us to work with 174 young people, of whom 133 completed courses and 111 have achieved the following positive outcomes to date:

Full time employment	26
Part-time employment	3
Further education	24
Training	57
Voluntary work	1

The Apex career preparation course in Polmont is the first accredited programme between the Scottish Prison Service and an external agency. The third course took place in February 2004. The eight young men who completed this course reported that they benefited from improved communication and presentation skills, understanding of the relevance of their offences to their employment choices, the ability to handle disclosing their record to an employer and increased self-confidence.

In addition, 149 young men in Polmont received one-to-one learning support from Apex between January 2003 and April 2004 and 130 completed their work programme in that period. To date, 35 of them have taken up local literacy support programmes on release, 11 went into a job that they have managed to sustain, 17 went on to other Apex community based initiatives and 4 enrolled on job training college based courses. Most of the remainder were transferred to adult prisons.

Stuart is one of those young men who worked with Apex since the beginning of his sentence, with a view to improving his literacy and numeracy skills and broadening his future employability options and prospects.

He recently won a Young Adult Learners' Award and in his testimonial, he wrote:

"I went back to education / learning around April 2003. I went back because I got my first and last prison sentence in March 2003. It was like the whole world came tumbling down around me and I knew I was not ever wanting to come back. So the only way forward for me, both in here and for my release date, was to get an education. I have been a waste of space most of my life so I wanted to further my education to make a difference to my life.

Since I've been in prison working with Maggie from Apex, she has been helping me and other prisoners one hundred and ten per cent. She has helped me reach what I'm capable of doing and I'm very grateful. Since doing my maths and English, I've gained a great deal of confidence. I can even read properly now and I've even gained qualifications due to the help I've been getting. I am a pool lifeguard, community sports leader and first aider. I've recently done a 'Youth at Risk' course, 'Food Handling' and 'Food Preparation' and I passed them all.

Because of this, I feel I've grown up a lot. I'm definitely a lot closer with family and friends and I feel I have a life and a future to look forward to, thanks to all the help I've received. All of this has changed my outlook on life because I've realised that anything is possible if you put your mind to it and commit yourself. Things don't change or get any better just by thinking about them.

I know my criminal record will be with me for the rest of my life, but it's not an excuse not to make a change in my life for me and my family. I've wasted too much of my life looking behind me. It's time to look to the future".

Stuart is keen to give something back to his community and other young people after he is released this summer. To this end, Apex negotiated his involvement in the Schools Liaison Programme provided by Lothian and Borders Police, in partnership with the education department.

Of the 130 young men who completed learning support programmes, we are aware that only 3 have since returned to Polmont, not because of re-offending, but because of outstanding charges. All have again engaged with Apex.

**Bernadette Monaghan** is Director of Apex Scotland. More information is available on [www.apexscotland.org.uk](http://www.apexscotland.org.uk)